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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000908

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SUBJECT: UNMEE SRSG ENNIFAR DISCUSSES ETHIOPIA-ERITREA

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 895

[1](#)B. ASMARA 317

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING POL-ECON COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador Azouz Ennifar told Ambassador that he sought to continue serving as head of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), despite Eritrea's continued refusal to recognize his official status. Ennifar said Eritrea's protests arose from difficulties in its relationship with the UN, not with him personally, and noted that the UN had failed to acknowledge to Eritrea that Ethiopia had informally rejected the earlier candidacy of UN Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh to head UNMEE. UN SYG Ban was seeking to contact Isaias, Ennifar said, to determine what the GSE wanted and its expectations of the UN. As both parties had moderated their public statements, perhaps seeking a joint statement underscoring Eritrea's rejection of war, and Ethiopia's acceptance of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) decision, was a tangible objective. GSE distrust of Japan's PermRep hampered Japan's ability to serve as a facilitator. Reviewing the current military situation along the border, Ennifar said at least 6,000 additional Eritrean troops and militia had settled in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and in areas the EEBC had awarded to Ethiopia, but that such movements were "defensive". Ethiopia continued to maintain 12 tanks at Bure, near Eritrea's port of Assab; and Eritrea continued to maintain 12 tanks at Omhajer, near Humera. March 8 attacks by Ethiopian rebels in Tigray had led to 40-60 casualties among the Ethiopian military near Humera, but were not considered a cross-border incident. Ennifar expressed concern that if the GSE were to expel all of UNMEE's humanitarian demining coordinators, then he would consider recommending UNMEE's withdrawal. END SUMMARY.

APPOINTMENT OF UNMEE SRSG NOMINEE SPARKED DISAGREEMENT

[1](#)2. (C) In a March 23 meeting with Ambassador and acting pol-econ counselor (note-taker), Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Ethiopia and Eritrea, Amb. Azouz Ennifar, said he planned to continue serving as UNMEE SRSG "as long as I am asked to." Despite Eritrea's refusal to recognize his official status since late 2006, Ennifar expressed doubt that a suitable replacement could be identified who would be acceptable to

both Ethiopia and Eritrea. He noted that President Isaias had refused to meet with the former UNMEE SRSG, Amb. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, for three years, permitting only a farewell call immediately prior to Legwaila's departure from office.

13. (C) Ennifar explained that the GSE's refusal to recognize his appointment stemmed from UN DPKO's failure to acknowledge, when confronted by Eritrea, that Ethiopia had rejected the candidacy of UN Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Political Affairs Tuliameni Kalomoh (formerly Namibia's deputy foreign minister) to replace Legwaila as UNMEE SRSG. The UN had not sought formal agreement for Kalomoh, but had approached both parties informally in 2006. Eritrea had accepted Kalomoh, while Ethiopia had not (for reasons unknown). Given lack of agreement on Kalomoh, the UN had next proposed that then-Deputy SRSG Ennifar become SRSG. The GSE had responded that while it liked Ennifar and recognized that he hailed from a country that had been helpful to Eritrea (Tunisia), it could not make a decision about his appointment until being informed of the status of Kalomoh's candidacy. UN DPKO had not formally informed Eritrea, until later, that Kalomoh's candidacy had been withdrawn, Ennifar said.

14. (C) To address this impasse, the UN had appointed Ennifar as "acting" SRSG in August 2006; the appointment was meant to be an administrative move that would not be formally announced, Ennifar said. However, UNMEE Force Commander Masadeh had mistakenly informed both parties of Ennifar's appointment formally in writing. Eritrea's UN PermRep had then protested the move to ASG for Peacekeeping Operations Hedi Annabi, calling Ennifar's appointment "unacceptable," and complaining that the UN was seeking to impose decisions on Eritrea. Eritrea subsequently refused to recognize

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Ennifar's official status.

UN SYG BAN SEEKS TO ENGAGE ISAIAS

15. (C) Ennifar said Eritrea's protests arose from difficulties in its relationship with the UN, not with him personally. The GSE had protested alleged bias in the January 2007 UN SYG report. UN SYG Ban was seeking to contact Isaias, Ennifar said, to determine what the GSE wanted and its expectations of the UN. Ennifar said that while Ethiopia had consistently stated it would support any dialogue, Eritrea remained opposed. Ethiopia had endorsed the February 2006 statement by Witnesses to the Algiers Accord, as it supported dialogue, but not the subsequent UN PRST. On the other hand, both parties had moderated their public statements: Eritrea no longer called for war, and Ethiopia no longer said it rejected the decision of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC). Perhaps a joint statement by both parties, underscoring these positions, was a tangible objective, Ennifar said.

TROOP BUILD-UP ASSESSED AS "DEFENSIVE"

16. (C) Reviewing the current military situation along the border, Ennifar reiterated that Eritrean troops and militia continued to settle in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and in areas the EEBC had awarded to Ethiopia, but that such movements were assessed to be "defensive" (ref A). Some 3,000 additional Eritrean forces had recently entered Sector West; an equal number had entered Sector Central. While Eritrean forces were capable of striking a single Ethiopian town, they could not sustain an attack, he said. Eritrea had expected Ethiopia to weaken its deployment along its northern border, due to Ethiopian engagement in Somalia; however, UNMEE had seen no evidence that this had occurred. Ennifar noted that Ethiopia had withdrawn two brigades from the

border immediately after the December 2005 passage of UNSCR 1640; Ethiopian forces had made "small movements back," but these did not constitute a violation of any accords, Ennifar underscored. Ethiopia continued to maintain 12 tanks at Bure, near Eritrea's port of Assab; since October, Eritrea continued to maintain 12 tanks at Omhajer, near Humera, and to control a cross-border bridge there that had formerly been controlled by UNMEE. Ennifar lamented that lack of commercial flights and of refueling capability prevented UNMEE patrols from traveling to Bure.

ETHIOPIAN REBELS ATTACK ETHIOPIAN MILITARY

¶17. (C) Ennifar reported that the Ethiopian military commander of Sector West had reported 40-60 casualties (including at least one civilian) as a result of a March 8 attack by two groups of Ethiopian rebels near Humera. Ennifar noted that Humera had also been the location of 12-15 bombings earlier this year. He said the March 8 incident would not/not necessarily be included in the next report of the UN SYG, as it did not appear to be a cross-border incident involving Eritrea.

¶18. (C) Ennifar subsequently provided poloff an internal UNMEE report with additional details: According to Ethiopian military sources, approximately 200 rebels from the Tigray People's Democratic Movement, and the Southern Ethiopian People's Front For Justice and Equality, had attacked Adi Goshu village, in Tigray, intending to destroy the agricultural, hospital, and administration office. Ethiopian forces opened fire, killing 18 rebels and capturing 26. During the firefight, two Ethiopian troops were injured, as were a pregnant woman; one civilian woman was killed. (NOTE: There are contradictory accounts of casualties; Ennifar noted that the Paris-based "Sudan Tribune" reported that the two rebel groups claimed to have killed 193 Ethiopian soldiers in their attack and to have wounded another 100, while destroying the Ethiopian military's arms depot at Adi Geshu. The fact that Ethiopia formally notified UNMEE of the incident suggests that the Ethiopian military likely did

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suffer casualties in this engagement. END NOTE.)

INABILITY TO TRANSFER INEFFECTIVE WORKING-LEVEL STAFF

¶19. (S) Ennifar cited the difficulty of maintaining two headquarters for UNMEE, in Addis Ababa and Asmara, and his inability to visit UNMEE personnel in Eritrea. Addressing UNMEE's relations with Eritrea, Ennifar confided that he considered Asmara-based Deputy SRSG Lebohang Moleko (Lesotho) "weak" for failing to rebut the GSE's criticism of the UN. For example, Moleko had sought the GSE's approval for UNMEE Addis Ababa Head of Office Joseph Stephanides to visit Asmara, rather than simply inform the GSE. Eritrea had promptly denied the request, Ennifar said, due to Stephanides' Cypriot nationality. Citing the ineffectiveness of some UNMEE personnel who remained in their positions for as long as five years, Ennifar expressed a desire to replace them, but said he had difficulty effecting their transfer elsewhere.

MACC CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR DEMINING

¶10. (C) Commenting on the GSE's recent expulsion of UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Committee (MACC) manager David Bax (ref B), Ennifar noted that, ironically, just prior to his expulsion, Bax had received a request from Eritrean presidential advisor Yemane Gebremeskel to conduct demining in an area of Eritrea that had not been in MACC's area of

operations. UNMEE had instructed Bax to assent to the GSE's request, believing it could help improve relations with the GSE. Ennifar said Bax's expulsion arose principally from his relationship with the U.S. Embassy, particularly his misjudgment in deciding to take a dismantled Embassy vehicle to a MACC site within the TSZ rather than to other, less sensitive MACC sites throughout Eritrea.

¶11. (S) UNMEE's recent downsizing (from 2,300 to 1,700) had led to the departure of Bangladeshi and Kenyan troops who had been active in humanitarian demining; UNMEE therefore now relied heavily on MACC for demining, Ennifar said. Were the GSE to expel MACC in its entirety, Ennifar said he would have to consider recommending UNMEE's withdrawal.

¶12. (C) Discussing the role that countries other than the U.S. could play in addressing Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions, in accordance with UNSCR 1741, Ennifar said the GSE was critical of Japan, as it blamed UNSCR 1640 (and its threat to sanction both parties) on Japanese UN PermRep Kenzo Oshima (who had visited the region in November 2005, in response to Eritrea's curtailing UNMEE flight operations).

¶13. (C) COMMENT: UNMEE SRSG Ennifar offered little insight into possible future actions that the UN SYG would recommend in his forthcoming April 2007 report to the UNSC. UNMEE's current mandate expires in July, and the EEBC is to cease operations in November 2007, the deadline for both parties to accept that the EEBC's decision to demarcate the border by coordinates. UN SYG Ban's desire to engage Isaias should be encouraged, as other efforts to address Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions appear to remain at a standstill, while Eritrea continues to expand its military occupation of the TSZ. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO